What's So Bad About Being Poor?

Our Lives In the Shadow of the Poverty Experts

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Preface

Charles Murray interfered with my career plans. During my first year of college, I was taking a required economics class. Early in the semester, when the subject turned to poverty, my professor assigned an essay from Murray, a conservative political scientist, think tank researcher, and future supporter of eugenicist theories. At the time, Murray main claim to fame was being a "poverty expert" whose criticism of welfare programs buttressed the Reagan revolution.[1]

Until I encountered the notorious Dr. Murray, my plan had been to research schizophrenia in order to find an effective treatment or a cure for my father's schizoaffective disorder. But I was so appalled by Murray that I decided to focus instead on taking him down a notch. His theories about poverty simply weren't accurate. I knew this because I grew up poor. Murray's wrongheadedness bugged me enough to change my life course.

The title of Murray's essay was, "What's So Bad about Being Poor?"[2] It appeared in 1988, in the aftermath of Ronald Reagan's two-term assault on the welfare state. In it, Murray suggested that being poor in the United States was not so bad after all, because welfare benefits were too generous. He blamed the plight of poor people on their own behavior, suggesting there was something inherently wrong with them. There were strong racial overtones to the article, portending the firestorm to come when he expanded on those sentiments in his 1994 coauthored book, *The Bell Curve.*[3] "What's So Bad about Being Poor?" was one of many rhetorical questions or hypotheticals raised by Murray about welfare dependency. My professor snapped them up and decided our assignment would be to answer Murray's questions.

The essay made me so angry, and I got out some of my feelings in my response paper to Professor Lund. But Murray had left a mark. I had been alerted to the fact that there were people in the United States who actually believed what I had suffered through was "not so bad."

What's so bad about being poor? What kind of person would even ask such a ridiculous question? What kind of person would casually observe "that there is nothing so terrible about poverty per se"? What kind of person would argue that "material resources . . . should be put last" in discussions of poverty policy. This point of view could not stand. I had to be part of correcting the record.

I had to become one of the people considered legitimate enough in my expertise to convince everyone that Charles Murray was a fool. I had to become a poverty expert in my own right. I wanted to explain that his ideas were toxic misconceptions, but I knew my personal experience alone would not be respected. I would need to become an academic.

Interestingly, Murray claimed that personal experience was precisely what was missing from the knowledge base of policy thinkers. The first line of his essay read, "One of the great barriers to a discussion of poverty and social policy in the 1980s is that so few people who talk about poverty have ever been poor." He himself had never really been poor (which was why he proposed "thought experiments" to understand what it might be like to be poor), but he was definitely right about the value of personal experience.

College can often be an awful experience for a poor student. I was fine academically and picked up what I needed to quickly. Yet, I nearly dropped out numerous times since I felt like I didn't fit in. Thankfully, fortunately, I had the help of a woman named Phyllis Gray. She worked with the federal educational opportunity program Upward Bound, which I had participated in during high school. I stuck it out through undergrad and eventually was ready to pick a graduate school.

One day, I was walking past the bulletin board in the social sciences building when a flyer caught my eye. It was from the University of Michigan. It said I could get a joint doctorate in Social Work and Psychology—at the same time. I could pursue my goal of

working with serious mental illness, *and* learn how to combine my life experience with scholarly evidence to put Murray in his place. Michigan had its own poverty expert, Sheldon Danziger. He was the anti-Murray.

I applied to the program despite the skepticism coming from my undergraduate advisers in both psychology and social work. Each told me to apply to other graduate schools, because Michigan was very difficult to get into. I shouldn't get my hopes up. I did as they suggested. When I was accepted to University of Michigan, it was against the odds. Thankfully, the School of Social Work used affirmative action for many types of underrepresented groups in higher education, including those from a low socioeconomic status.

I didn't realize that you don't really get to focus on your own goals in graduate school. You find senior professors to mentor you, and you work on their research. Eventually, your dissertation becomes something related to your mentor's research. Thankfully, I had a good mentor. I would never have finished graduate school without Dr. Carol Mowbray, co-leader of the Center for Poverty, Risk, and Mental Health. She made sure I understood how to do research inside and out. But it was *her* area of research I was working on.

I thus wasn't able to aim my work toward countering Charles Murray. The deeper I got into academia, the more I was bifurcated into having two areas of expertise: 1) poverty and social policy; and 2) mental health. My publications were not in social policy either. They were all coming out in the mental health area. I was restless with frustration.

Meanwhile, Charles Murray wouldn't leave me alone. In 1993, he published an article about "the coming white underclass." This spurred an article in the *U.S. News & World Report*[4] that identified my hometown, Waterloo, Iowa, as having the seventh-largest population of poor white people in the country. Murray was writing about people like me, and he was blaming the rise of the white underclass on single parenthood. The implication of his work was that these were dumb white people who weren't getting married but were procreating dumb, violent, drug-addicted children. Read in light of Murray's controversial 1994 book *The Bell Curve,*[5] the

strong implication was that these poor white people were genetic failures.

Murray was particularly focused on the inability of poor whites to form families. Single women were destined for poverty, he argued. He didn't realize that conservatives had set up welfare in the stupidest way possible if their goal was to encourage marriage. My own parents had once gotten separated in part because of the rules made for welfare. When Reagan came into office, conservatives prevented two-parent families from receiving aid. My family couldn't get aid unless my mom was single.

I know about these cuts, because, in 1981, my parents became ineligible for Aid to Dependent Children of Unemployed Parents, the program that was then often simply referred to as "welfare" for two-parent families. Murray was insulting poor women of all races for being single mothers when that was the last thing they wanted to be.

As a graduate student, I taught social policy to master's-level social work students. I told them about theories of poverty, including Murray's, and then presented research evidence to dismantle Murray. I threw in personal experience to hammer the points home. My students gave me great reviews. This wasn't exactly making change on a large scale, though.

When I became a professor, I continued to read Murray and his employer, the American Enterprise Institute, spewing forth about how easy it was for Americans to live in poverty, yet I had no effective way to respond. I was at a different university with another renowned poverty expert, but we weren't working together. I was being drawn into research on the quality of care in social services. This was a worthy cause, but not a step toward shutting down Murray's falsehoods.

Charles Murray said that readers should do a thought experiment in which they imagined they were poor. But I don't want readers to use their imaginations. I want them to listen to a testimonial like mine about the reality of being poor.

I had been writing a book about my family since I was ten years old. Because of the age I was when I first developed this goal, I believed that it was a mission that came straight from God. At that age,

I was praying daily, out loud, and I imagined I heard God's reply. At the time, I wasn't too far removed from being a fundamentalist Mormon.

I wanted to pattern my book after Andrew Solomon's *The Noonday Demon: An Atlas of Depression,*[6] a memoir that doubles as a scientific study. But I ended up making different decisions than he did. In his book, he tried to use real names as often as possible. I couldn't do that. I have used a lot of pseudonyms, mixed in with as many real names as I could muster. Welcome to my family and our mental health struggles.

My book is about poverty and mental illness in a white, American family, my own. It is also about coming of age, coming apart, and coming to the point of finishing this book. Nothing is this book was easy to experience, and I wish I could portray the true emotional impact of the array of experiences, but I'm so damaged by them, my emotions are frozen. Everything in this book suggests why I took personal offense at Charles Murray's question and why the best response to him was to tell my family's story.

It is so bad to be poor.

Chapter One: Early Onset of Mental Illness

Fifty years ago, my mom and dad created thick, heavy books of family history with page after page of our relatives listed with their families. At first glance, this seems like an extremely boring hobby. You're just systematically listing family members with birth, marriage, and death dates. Over and over.

They created the genealogy books in Salt Lake City, Utah, where they met in 1970 at the famous genealogy library of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints' (LDS). Their relationship began because of the Mormons.

My father in a suit and tie

A picture containing my mother, standing, posing with her Bible in a church gown

Figure 1. Pictures of my father and mother in their youth

This should have been a romantic story of a chatty blonde with a cute gap in her front teeth falling in love with the dark-haired, seductively good-looking man who is equally entranced. Except that's not how it happened. They both had a secret. They were two very troubled people when they met.

In 1965, my father, John, graduated from high school, and voluntarily joined the Air Force, as his father had done during World War II. It was not an easy time for Dad. His best friend from high school had just been killed in a car accident.

Dad wanted to follow in his father's footsteps. Diabetes had prevented his father from being a pilot during WWII, but our dad could join the Air Force to serve during Vietnam. Maybe he could even learn to fly planes. He tried to do everything right. He had been an altar boy and a Boy Scout. Dad voluntarily joined the Air Force, but when his parents were not happy that he had enlisted, it broke his heart. Dad had the weight on ancestry on his side, though.

When I conducted my own genealogical research, I found that on my dad's side going back to the Revolutionary War —and even well before then in the Pequot War in 1636—our family has been involved in battles.

During his time in the Air Force, Dad was stationed in Texas, Arizona, and Colorado. He was nearly deployed twice to Thailand. The orders were canceled both times when war plans changed. One

day, when he was twenty-one years old, my father heard a man whistling. The whistling began to agitate and then infuriate him. He attacked the man he thought was whistling. Witnesses said the man wasn't making a sound.

Dad was sent to psychiatric lockup. Based on his obvious psychotic breakdown, he came away with a diagnosis of schizoaffective disorder, which combined the often-paranoid delusions and hallucinations of schizophrenia with the deep despair and self-loathing of depression.[7]

Dad told the psychiatrists about his military buddy Alex from the planet Orarus-Orr in another star system. He also told them about going in a UFO to Zorcon and Mare Crisium, planets supposedly prophesied in the Book of Samuel in the Bible. In 1969, the Air Force gave him an honorable medical discharge after three-and-a-half years of service.

Other people may have simply concluded Dad was becoming mentally ill when this incident occurred, but he told me that his "visions" went all the way back to early puberty.

Picture of the Angel Moroni trumpeting

Figure 2. Picture of the angel Moroni

As Dad told it, a Mormon friend from the military had taken him to visit Salt Lake City during leave. He had seen the magnificent Mormon temple with the statue of the angel Moroni trumpeting to the people to come to the Lord. He understood Joseph Smith, the founder of the Mormons, and his visions of angels. *He had them too.* He felt the Mormon faith call to him.

Dad was particularly obsessed with the "Lost Tribes of Israel," and he believed he made contact with them on other planets. He

would talk about this all the time. The Lost Tribes of Israel were part of his dreams. They were part of how he interpreted every Bible verse. To show his devotion to Israel, he made an official-sized canvas flag that had blue and white stripes with a Star of David in the corner of it. It represented the Lost Tribes of Israel with whom he'd had contact in outer space. Dad hung the flag in a prominent place on the wall wherever he lived.

Dad fit in perfectly with huge numbers of his countrymen who followed faith leaders. Plenty of other Americans are obsessed with Israel too. Kurt Andersen wrote a book called *Fantasyland: How America Went Haywire—A 500 Year History*,[8] in which he explained that a generation of Americans began obsessing about the End Times right about the same time Mom and Dad did. It wasn't specific to their mental illnesses. It was part of the culture too.

Andersen explained that Americans became actively involved with fundamentalist faiths again. Check. He said they were taking the Bible literally more often. Check. He said they were exploring the occult and mysticism. Check. He said they were seeing every war in the Middle East as a sign of the apocalypse. Check.

Apparently, at the time Dad came to Utah, his parents were going to kick him out of the house. They didn't understand his medical discharge from the military, or why he seemed to be lying around in bed a lot. That was the *affective* part of the schizoaffective disorder. Once, many years later, when I was about eighteen, our grandmother leaned over to me and whispered, "I think your father has schizophrenia. He hasn't been right since he was a child." With that, his mother turned away ashamed. We never spoke of it again.

Once he was married, Dad could not have resented the fact that he had a wife and children more. It wasn't his idea to have a family. He always swore he loved our mother and us kids, but that didn't mean he didn't feel manipulated into having us.

In 1968, when, my mother Laura[9] was twenty-three years old, she returned to Iowa months early from a two-year Lutheran mission to teach English in New Guinea. It had not gone well there. Once she arrived, she realized the arrogance of telling other people what to believe. They already had their own belief systems and she felt shy about imposing hers on them.

The first year went okay, but two new missionary women arrived the second year. They were not there to be helpful to the local people or to spread Christianity. They were exploring their freedom and rebelling against authority. They drank. They smoked. They played poker all night long, flouting a law that prohibited card-playing in New Guinea. The law was enacted because many gambling husbands traded their wives, who had been put up as collateral for bets. The new girls teased our mother for her devotion to the Bible and the missionary rules. Mom had counted on them to help grade the stacks of children's school essays; instead, they were like children themselves. The more Mom dwelled on the situation, the more upset she got. It wasn't long before she ended up in the hospital with an opportunistic case of mononucleosis. Her Australian doctor diagnosed her with major depression.

She took the yellow-and-white pills he prescribed until she became convinced they were making her depression worse—even making her feel suicidal. Decades later, research would show that antidepressants can make depressive symptoms worse in people with bipolar disorder,[10] but Mom's bipolar disorder II was not yet recognized.[11]

The doctor scoffed at the notion that the pills could be making her worse, saw the palmful of pills she had been hiding in her drawer, and made her take all of them at once. This psychiatrist was so aggressively arrogant that Mom crumbled instead of resisting further. "These pills are perfectly safe. They do not cause depression," he insisted. "Take them!"

She did.

That "solution" actually worked, briefly. She was awake for days, happy and full of energy.[12] She exercised three times a day for a week. She did all her work, plus the work of those "lazy, mean missionary girls." The elderly German woman she was staying with

commented, "Why, I haven't seen someone go from so sickly to so healthy so quickly in my whole life."

Beaming, Mom said, "We can do anything with God's help." The crash that followed approximately five days later led her to take every pill she had in an attempted overdose.

In Laura's mind, the only precipitant for her depression was her poor health and the other missionary girls. However, reports by her sisters and brothers contradict this perspective. As her sister told me when we discussed Mom's depression, "She was a sensitive child, often withdrawn. She seemed down much of the time."

But I was more interested in how Mom ended up halfway around the globe from her family and in a totally different culture. I remembered how scared I was to live in Germany with a class of college students I knew, including a dear friend, for only six months. Not alone. Our mother was brave. Gutsy. I knew this, but she had cracked up overseas, and I also wanted to understand that.

Mom told stories about how she grew up driven to seek approval, running into the house and asking if she was doing a good job after she swept each concrete block on the sidewalk. She took it as a personal failure when no one accepted the cream and sugar she offered at her mother's tea parties. She'd cry silently in the closet from the rejection if no one was interested. She endlessly tried to get attention, most often by faking sickness or injury.

Mom would cozy up to the heat register to make her forehead hot and feverish. She would lie on the ground under a swing set, making it look as though she had fallen off. After she twisted herself into a position on the ground as if she'd been injured, she'd wait for someone to rescue her, eventually giving up when no one seemed to notice her lying there.

Her father's narcissistic focus on his own ideas and his business meant his daughter often went unnoticed. Even at the age of seventy-five, Mom still displayed a picture of her father with her perched on his knee. Our grandfather suffered from bipolar symptoms that his daughter inherited. His migraine headaches drew his attention away as well. It wasn't that he didn't love his children. They were sometimes brought along on business trips. It was the pervasive

neglect, and his insistence on having things his way that eventually led to the self-imposed moniker, "Crazy Dad."

Whatever the factors that led to her suicide attempt in New Guinea, Mom returned home earlier than planned in 1968. While she was in the southern hemisphere, half of her family had converted from the Lutheran to the Mormon faith, led by her brother, Paul[13]. When she got back to the States, she dutifully attended an LDS church service in Cedar Falls, Iowa.

Her father's influence had always cast a long shadow on her worldview, and with both of her parents converting, it felt lonely and marginal to remain Lutheran. The family members who weren't converting had married and moved away. Besides, she said that the Mormon missionaries who came to visit were lovely people, *always so sincere*.

Trying to make a new start in the United States, Laura moved to Minneapolis and took a job at the Hennepin County Juvenile Detention Center, a maximum-security facility for both male and female offenders. One of the most interesting people she met was the "real" Charlie Brown. He worked with the male offenders, so they didn't get to see each other often.

On Christmas Eve 1968, when only a few detainees remained over the holidays, Charlie Brown played the piano and sang. He reminded our mother of the cartoon character, and she learned that he and Charles Schulz were indeed good childhood friends and that Schulz had received his permission to base his *Peanuts* character on him. Mom said he was truly a wonderful human being—just one that seemed to have more than his fair share of melancholy.

Mom was back into a state of suicidal crisis by the spring of 1969, about a year after leaving New Guinea. Working at the juvenile detention center, county employees were supposed to go to a county health clinic. However, the doctor did nothing for Mom but send her home for the weekend, asking her to return on Monday. The only trouble was that suicidal feelings are a life-and-death problem, so this was like sending someone home with a heart attack. Even though she said, "I feel just like I did a year ago," it was not judged to be an emergency.

She turned to Dr. Green, a private physician, and called him when things were becoming too much to cope with. She asked him if he was busy. He bluntly stated he was, so she apologized and hung up, quietly determined never to bother anyone again. She devoured a bottle of sleeping pills and turned on the gas in the apartment she shared with three other "inhospitable women."

That landed Mom in the hospital, where the story gets confusing. She remembers being discharged shortly after that. She began seeing Dr. Green on an outpatient basis, but she quickly ended up in a six-week recuperation at Glenwood Hills Psychiatric Hospital. Glenwood Hills was a beautiful new facility dedicated to treating mental illnesses.

At one point, Laura met someone who recommended that she see one Reverend Pfotenhauer, a Lutheran minister who had a deliverance ministry in his basement in St. Paul. She described the meeting with Rev. Pfotenhauer as follows:

"He began to speak to the 'demons' in me, asking them questions. I was a bit shocked when my voice answered—without my volition—that his name was Bavasiki. He identified himself as the 'spirit of suicide.' . . . They proceeded and a second demon was identified. This one, called Kenona, refused to come out. He just said . . . 'It isn't time yet.' That seemed to be the end of it, and the session was over . . . He [Kenona] was the 'spirit of depression.'"

That's Mom's interpretation of her experience, and she says she was never suicidal after that. She doesn't seem to remember that she *was* suicidal again during our childhoods.

On a visit home to her family in Iowa, she was introduced to a recent Mormon convert, a nice young man. This was my future father, just home from the service. They saw each other at a ward (local congregation) event and exchanged small talk. Shortly afterward, Dad decided to move to Utah. Mom decided she was maybe not interested in him anyway because he was Mormon, and she was still trying to figure out her own faith in the wake of her family's conversion. At any rate, she was living in Minneapolis, not near Utah.

Mom didn't seriously consider converting from Lutheran to Mormon, until she went to a Billy Graham crusade and saw a table

of literature with an anti-Mormon section. She compared what she'd experienced with Mormons to what she was reading in this denigrating literature. To her, those brochures were proof that people lied about Mormons. Therefore, the Mormon Church must be speaking the truth and was being persecuted. It was enough to tip Mom over the edge, and she decided to become a Mormon.

She began studying the texts of her new religion with devotion: the Bible,[14] the Book of Mormon,[15] the Doctrine and Covenants,[16] and the Pearl of Great Price.[17] Ultimately, she pursued her "desire for spiritual sustenance"[18] by moving to the Mormon mecca: Salt Lake City.

At this point, neither of our parents were aware that this religion is based on white supremacy. Joseph Smith created a religion with a story in which dark-skinned people in the Americas killed off light-skinned people. (Needless to say, there is no archeological evidence whatsoever for this having happened). Those dark-skinned people became Native Americans.

In January 1970, Dad took a job at the Visitor Center near the Temple in Salt Lake City. Later that month, Mom arrived in town to "deepen her understanding of her new faith," while using the Mormon Church's world-renowned library of family genealogy to learn about her family tree. The Mormon ritual of baptizing the dead has led them to amass the largest collection of records related to family history available anywhere.

Mom stopped into the Visitor Center to get information about the area. Again, our parents crossed paths. The fact that these two Iowans, who grew up blocks away from each other, both landed in Utah and crossed paths in the Mormon Visitor Center, compelled them to spend time together, especially at the genealogy library.

When church elders got word of the two new converts meeting by chance, they were confident God was asserting His will to have these two people marry. The odds of meeting in Iowa about six months before running into each other again in Utah had to be supernaturally small, right? They were both in Salt Lake City trying out a new faith as a remedy for old troubles. *There, in Salt Lake City, coincidences were interpreted as destiny.*

A tradition of the Mormon Church is to offer a "patriarchal blessing" when a patriarch of the church provides guidance about life, ostensibly channeled straight from God. The patriarch is part of a hierarchy not unlike the Catholic Church, with its single leader, cardinals, and bishops.

The purpose of a patriarchal blessing is to restate one's connection to the tribes of Israel, provide gifts of spiritual knowledge, and offer specific advice to individuals about their circumstances. At a general conference of the Mormon Church, President Ezra Taft Benson stated, "Study [your patriarchal blessing] carefully and regard it as personal scripture to you—for that is what it is . . . then read it regularly that you may know God's will for you."

Dad's blessing included a recommendation to marry and begin a family. It was this spiritual mandate that led him to ask Mom to become his wife. Mom had her own "vision" foretelling that this marriage was God's plan, but she was more enthusiastic than John. He silently felt manipulated into the whole thing by the church elders. Within five months of meeting in Utah, they married with two witnesses in attendance.

Given what I'd eventually learn about their past, this clearly was the beginning of one of the most ill-advised couplings imaginable. Prone to zealotry because of the desperation of their search, they had neither the will nor the wherewithal to resist the elder's blessing.

During their short courtship, they learned almost nothing about each other. Even our father's disclosure that a UFO had abducted him failed to scare Mom away. Likewise, Dad did not call things off after learning Mom participated in an exorcism. What did they have in common besides growing up near each other in Iowa?

They knew they both liked to read. They both loved genealogy. They both felt they were on a quest for the truth. Mostly they enjoyed asking existential questions such as, "Which is God's true church?" and "Which modern-day prophet should one follow?"

Much later, Mom would say, "I think it all boils down to that your dad and I simply never were really 'in love,' although at the time it seemed like a good idea. Who knew back then?" Dad only wanted to join the Mormons because the angel Moroni called to him and they talked about the Lost Tribes of Israel. He never counted on this whole family-responsibility angle. He could deal with getting married to this woman. He could love her. But he didn't think about the fatherhood duties. He wasn't up for them. He wasn't well.

Our parents met a couple named Kurt and Angie shortly after they got married. These two were hard-core survivalists who believed they needed to prepare for the coming invasion of the government due to the collapse of society. This was going to happen near the impending apocalypse. The omnipresent, always imminent apocalypse.

They had stored away a year's worth of supplies, and Mom and Dad attempted to do the same. Their survivalist friends told Mom she would be giving birth in the woods by the time of her due date if she got pregnant. They took our parents around to different stores to buy supplies for the coming Armageddon. Mom and Dad looked for land to purchase together with Kurt and Angie. Only a few months later, Mom was pregnant. When I arrived before the End Times, I surprised everyone.

Home pregnancy tests were not available over the counter at the time, so Mom went to some extreme lengths over a weekend to find out if she was expecting. She had heard about a Hungarian physician named Dr. Ignatz von Peczely, who re-founded the "science" of iridology. Iridology was "reading" the iris of the eye to detect medical conditions. Although discredited,[19] and probably in part because it was discredited, Mom sought someone who could perform this craft. The man she found told her that iridology only detects disease, not naturally occurring phenomena like pregnan-

cies. She dragged our dad everywhere over the weekend, looking for someone to tell her if she was pregnant or not, but she ended up having to wait until Monday.

When I was older, Mom shared a letter with me about how she told our dad that they had a firstborn on the way:

"I rushed home from the doctor's office in the happiest state I had ever experienced. My feet never touched the ground. At home, I found your father reading a newspaper at the kitchen table. Coming up behind him, wrapping my arms around his chest, I announced, 'We are having a baby.' Immediately, he threw my arms from around him with such force as to send me flying backward across the room. His face became a deep purple, his eyes glowered, and his fists clenched. He left the house for the remainder of the day."

He was clearly not ready for the responsibility so soon. He didn't have a solid job yet. Anyone can understand where he was coming from. In the Mormon belief system, as the man, he was responsible for the family. At least in his family growing up, his parents had worked equally to support the family.

My college-educated mother wasn't exactly prepared to have me either. She thought that when I was born I wouldn't open my eyes for the first few days, just like a newborn puppy. She was amazed when I came into the world with big blue eyes full of curiosity. It seems like a significant gap in the education of a woman licensed to teach elementary school.

Thankfully, things got much better after I was born. Mama told me later: "You were completely doted upon by both your father and your mother. I remember when I had you wrapped up like a mummy in your blankie and I placed you between the pillows on our big double bed. Your dad just looked over at you—so tiny against that big bed [and cried, saying], 'You don't know what that little girl has done for me.'"

His attitude had changed quite a bit by then.

During the early part of her pregnancy, Mom went for prenatal care with a medical doctor. Once. Perhaps through years of influence from her very patriarchal father, Mom accepted alternative medicine much more than traditional medicine. Grandpa Meyer was famous for saying things like: "A lack of aspirin doesn't cause

headaches"; "They took fifty years to accept the thermometer"; and, "Remember, the establishment mocked the man who said handwashing was key to preventing disease[20]."

At the appointment, an argument ensued between Mom and the doctor, whom she saw as hyper-arrogant, over the best way to proceed with her delivery. The doctor said, "If you're going to be so pigheaded about it, why don't you go home and deliver your own baby?"

The suggestion became her new conviction. She found a naturopath who agreed to deliver her firstborn at home. This doctor, Rulon Allred, would later become famous for his violent death at the hands of a faction of fundamentalist Mormons. My parents had no idea Allred had five wives and was the leader of a polygamous cult. In 1977, a rival cult leader ordered one of his wives to kill Allred.[21] Allred's name appears on my birth certificate, though it was actually one of his associates who delivered me.

Until 1890, polygamy was a doctrine of the Mormon Church. However, after about sixty years of being mocked by other Christians and out of a desire to join Utah with the United States, the Church opted to outlaw polygamy or, as many advocates like to call it, "plural marriage."

A group of followers who disagreed with the change in the church's stance broke off, many moving north to Canada or south to Mexico to live out their beliefs in communal settings. Those who remained in Utah frequently skirmished with each other, and once with the federal government. In a 1979 stand-off, federal agents ended up killing one such Utahan, John Singer. This fed our parents' anti-government attitudes.

Our parent's association with Dr. Allred, led the elders of their church ward to call them in for "a meeting." The elders questioned the circumstances of their connection to Allred and warned them about interacting with him. Defiant toward authority in their own ways, my parents likely became only more determined to learn about fundamentalist Mormons. This was the first rumbling of my family's avalanche of later problems. In many ways, it was predictable that they would be vulnerable to a cult.

Shortly after getting married, Mom brought home a little blue book from the Salt Lake City Public Library that in her words "caught her eye." She saw *Book of Onias,*[22] authored by Robert C. Crossfield, and she felt "drawn" to it. Mama felt the Holy Spirit, (or as Mormons frequently said, the Holy Ghost), calling her to read his book.

Crossfield was a self-proclaimed prophet and seer, a man who was extreme enough to have been rejected from all the Fundamentalist Latter-day Saint (FLDS) sects. In his 1969 book, Crossfield revealed that LDS leadership was misleading the Mormon Church. The Mormons, he argued, had abandoned Joseph Smith's teachings when they agreed to give up polygamy in exchange for being part of the United States. He chastised the faithful for abandoning polygamy and called on Latter-day Saints to heed the words of the church's founding prophets, Joseph Smith and Brigham Young.

Smith's revelations focused on marriage. Essentially, Smith told his followers that God wanted humanity to practice polygamy with men having multiple wives, just as occurred in the Old Testament. Smith married more than three dozen women himself.

Also known by his self-decreed name — the "Prophet Onias" — Crossfield wrote about receiving a series of revelations from God beginning in 1961. He received divine guidance "straight from the Lord" that men were to have multiple wives as Abraham of the Old Testament had. He appealed to fellow Mormons to look at sections promoting "plural marriage" in the *Doctrine and Covenants*, an LDS holy book. Onias knew directly from the source that God was unhappy with this betrayal because having multiple wives was "the Most Holy Principle." Most LDS members rejected Onias's teachings, and the Church eventually excommunicated him. Onias's presence threatened the leadership of sects of the fundamentalist Mormons too. They let him visit their compounds, but he didn't seem to have permission to stay.

Enamored with Crossfield's apparent connection to God, our parents wrote to him in 1971 and invited him down to Salt Lake City to share his revelations in person. Excited to have potential new followers, the Prophet Onias obliged and said he would come to Salt Lake City to visit. He traveled with two of his daughters from a small town in Alberta, Canada, to Utah shortly after I was born.

Onias's girls were dressed in the traditional clothing of fundamentalist Mormons: long dresses that covered them from neck to toe, and they didn't wear any makeup. Their long hair was braided and twisted into an attractive style. They were the picture of demure, polite, submissive women trained to serve their male superiors.

Mom was impressed when Onias took me as an infant into the bedroom and cuddled me to his chest as he rested from the long drive. She liked how fatherly and family-oriented he was. He certainly reacted to me in an immediately positive way that differed significantly from how Dad had initially responded. For this reason alone, she was drawn to Onias.

Our parents said goodbye to Onias, enthralled with him. "The Most Holy Principle" he taught about polygamy as God's highest law appealed to them. Even Dad was intrigued. But he was now supposed to go out and find *another* wife to have children with. I imagine my father thought he could exercise more choice this time. Having just gotten married to Dad, Mom wasn't sure she felt ready to share him. But she was eager to get on with the process of starting their plural marriage if that was what God wanted.

They kept in touch with Crossfield but chose not to move to Canada to live with what Crossfield hoped would be his growing congregation. They were going to be a part of Onias's scattered flock—a flock spread out all over North America, and beyond, too. They began several years of studying Onias's teachings. When he received a new revelation, he mailed a copy to our parents.

Shortly after Onias's visit, Dad declared that Salt Lake City was too oppressive for him. Too many rules, too much dogma. He liked coffee. He wanted to smoke Camel Straights again like he had in the Air Force. Mormons did not do such things. Strangely enough, fundamentalist Mormons have not always followed the same rules about avoiding alcohol, caffeine, and tobacco that the mainstream LDS Church has.

Besides, the park they loved to take me to, Liberty Park, became the scene of a double murder—a mixed-race couple jogging together, the crime motivated by racism. Mom was certain it was a legacy from the racist past of Utah. Our parents decided to move home to Iowa. But if that's where Dad was going to avoid feeling oppressed, he was heading to the wrong place.

Chapter Two: Dad Just Can't Adjust

Mom and Dad opted to live in a home near Dad's grandparents in Nashua, Iowa. They loved living there. They spent time in Cannon Park with me. They got ice cream together at the Dairy Queen. They talked about everything over coffee, but God especially occupied their conversations. Dad considered our little family perfect. The only thing that could ruin all this was the announcement of another pregnancy. The maintenance job Dad had would not support a family of four, and there were no other jobs available in Nashua.

They were going to have to move closer to his parents by turning to the city where the jobs were—Waterloo. Our dad decided he would take classes at Hawkeye Community College here to study civil engineering when he was not at work. Dad would end up feeling like he failed at this because he could never get a turn using the equipment he needed for class. It's a near certainty, though, that his disorganized mind and psychotic thinking were a substantial factor in his inability to complete college classes.

Once in Waterloo, Dad felt miserable being so close to his parents. They had been living in the house his grandparents had lived in, while his parents lived less than ten miles away in Cedar Falls. Only a few years prior, his folks had kicked him out of their house after he got home from the service. The rest of the family didn't know the details of what happened during that time; they only knew that Dad did not get along well with his parents. He especially

felt like he could never please them, win their approval, or raise his status within the family.

Dad had already converted from the strong—let's say rigid--Catholic tradition in his family to being a fundamentalist Mormon. He tried to keep this fact hidden from his parents, while avoiding invitations to Mass. He'd had his fill of Catholicism from going to Catholic school all the way to high school graduation. He dodged questions about where he and Mom got married, by whom, and in what faith. If his parents had known he was building up the courage to add a second wife, they would have exploded on the spot.

Mom's insistence on delivering her children at home instead of a hospital was already drawing our grandma's side-eye glances of disapproval. It was plain that Grandma thought a lot of what Mom said was strange. Mom is a talker, and when she's nervous, she'll go nonstop. Grandma could have heard a thought stream of Mom's ideas about alternative medicine. And religion. And lots of other questionable topics.

Grandma, on the other hand, was a woman of science. If she'd had her choice, she would have had a doctorate in Family Science or Family Ecology, where her expertise in preserving cloth from the 1800s would be in research journals. She did achieve a graduate degree in Home Economics, which was the Family Science of her school, but she'd wanted to continue her education.

Being a wife and mother got in the way. For a woman who overcame polio to walk again, succumbing to barriers was considered anathema. In the end, for most of her life, Grandma MacIntyre[23] was a full-time, adjunct professor at the University of Northern Iowa in the Home Economics department. Eventually, the university named a small museum collection after her that housed her textiles from the 1800s and early 1900s, but it's extremely difficult to access.

Mom insists that when she met Dad's family she could automatically notice a strong favoritism toward Dad's younger brother, Stan. She said Dad never spoke of any dynamic like that, but she picked up on it. Over time, Mom would hear about how Stan was allowed to do things Dad never got to do, like play football, get braces, get his

higher education partially paid for, and even socialize during high school.

Not long after my brother, David, was born in 1973 (at home, in our parents' bedroom, without a midwife) we all moved again. This time, instead of leaning on Dad's parents, we leaned on Mom's. For our new home, Mom and Dad moved into the apartment above Grandpa Meyer's chiropractic office/home in Sheboygan, Wisconsin, where my memories began. Where Dad had a great job at a chemical factory. Where Dad got so sick.

To hear Mom tell it, everything went wrong sometime in the spring of 1975 when I was four years old. There was a noise, a cross between a thud and a crack, that came from the living room. Dad had fallen.

The 911 emergency line didn't exist yet. You just had to call the ambulance. Mama grabbed towels from the bathroom and pressed them against our father's face as she cradled his head and shoulders in what was left of her lap, since her tummy was inflated with baby Samuel[24]. When the towels were soaked, she pulled the red bandana from her long, straight blonde hair and pressed it against his nose. "Don't just stand there staring, help him!" she yelled at Grandpa, her pale blue eyes flashing with anger. Grandpa stooped down, took Dad's hand from mine, and touched his wrist. "He's got a steady pulse." Dad's groans grew louder.

Emergency sirens wailed in the distance. They were so far away! But eventually, people in uniforms were whirling around, trying to figure out how to get the stretcher cradling our father down the long flight of stairs. I ducked out of the way into my room.

After the blaring sirens, the crackling of the emergency radios, the yelling voices, and the stomping feet faded from our home, I crept back out to where Dad had fallen. Grandpa had his camera out. I was worried about Dad and grossed out by the blood. "Look at this," Grandpa said. When I glanced to where he was pointing, I saw the imprint of my father's two front teeth embedded in the

blood-smeared hardwood floor. Grandpa finished snapping pictures. I'd share them, but they were damaged in a flood.

Mom came home alone when it was dark. She was quiet, but I wasn't sleeping. When she stole a look into our room, she saw my eyes were open. "Is Daddy okay?"

"I don't know, sweetie. I just don't know." She started to tell me a story, but didn't finish it, just curled up with me on my twin bed and fell asleep.

As the days passed, Dad remained in the hospital. I missed putting together puzzles with him and listening to him read me bedtime stories. I also missed his mischievous nature.

Before he got sick, we spent our evenings as a family, gathered on worn furniture and braided floor rugs to watch TV programs that Mom considered wholesome enough. *Little House on the Prairie*, *Star Trek*, and *The Waltons* all passed her scrutiny. Long before it became popular to ask, "What would Jesus do?" my mom was doing her own version of trying to be like Jesus. Hollywood was a known polluter of children's minds, so she asked herself what Jesus would let us watch.

While Mom was an authoritarian about keeping her children pure, Dad was more permissive. He would let me sneak out to watch detective shows like *Quincy, M.E. or Charlie's Angels* with him after Mom went to sleep. I became a lifelong lover of crime dramas and mysteries. And TV.

My father holding a book with me (Deborah) and my brother David

Figure 3 Dad with David and me

Our family's second-floor apartment was located above the room where Grandma slept, and the office where Grandpa was a chiropractor. He got his degree at a prestigious school for chiropractic medicine in Texas. So did Grandma Meyer[25], but she never practiced as a chiropractor. She only served as Grandpa Meyer's receptionist. Grandpa brought in his mother to care for his children and kept his wife by his side at work.

Grandpa's greatest insights came from his study of Eastern medicine. He believed deep and rhythmic breathing held benefits for the immune system and physical well-being generally, so he created a chair that reclined bodies into a position perfect for deep diaphragmatic breathing, with your legs supported in the air and your head rested at a declining angle. In other words, the chair almost turned a person upside down. It looked fun, but it was too big for children to use. There were plenty of other things to play with in Grandpa's chiropractic office. First, there was the adjustment table, contoured to the human body, which could move a standing person into the position of lying down when Grandpa stepped on the right button. Once patients were slowly lowered flat, Grandpa would twist and manipulate their necks and spines. Crack . . . pop . . . over and over. Then, there were gushing thank yous to Grandpa for making their pain feel better. Grandpa also had an X-ray machine, and he would sometimes allow us to put the film of an anonymous neck or spine up on the backlight.

There were reminders in the apartment behind the office of what must have been Grandma Meyer's personality before she developed

brain cancer. She was completely of Finnish origin, and the Finns love their saunas. Grandma's sauna wasn't a room like those at the local spa. Her sauna sat nestled into a corner of the mudroom separating Grandpa's chiropractic office from where they lived. It was the small kind of sauna that you sat in naked, with your head sticking out the top. Our grandma was not well enough to tell me tales of how good the moist heat would be for my health, but Mom reminded me often. When the sauna wasn't turned on, it was a perfect spot for hide-and-seek.

Chapter Three: Narcissistic Abuse

Aside from his medical equipment, Grandpa knew a few ways to entertain children between patients on slow days. He kept a stock of colorful balloons at the office reception desk that he blew up and twisted into animal shapes.

He also made a habit of swinging children back and forth through the air by their ankles. Not only was it obvious to him that most youngsters loved the thrill of flying, but he also believed that the swinging motion provided corrective benefits for little spines knocked out of whack during routine slips and falls. When he was too tired to swing, Grandpa loved to bounce children on his lap; randomly, he would pull his knees apart to allow a sudden, but safe, plunge.

After they took Dad away without bringing him back for a few months, Mama packed up the car trunk with blankets, a picnic basket, and a cooler. She put our favorite drinks, little grape juice cans with plastic pull tops, into fresh ice in the cooler. Mama pushed forward the driver's seat of our Chevy Impala and told David, then me, to hop in the back.

As she drove, we passed by billboards and signs with bright company logos that gave way to alternating patches of trees and farmland. We passed a few fields with quite a few cows. We were going for a trip to the hospital where Dad was staying.

David and I usually teased each other on car rides. Sometimes I would poke or tickle him, anything to make him giggle. This time, we each looked out our windows in silence.

Eventually, Mom turned into a long driveway surrounded by perfectly spaced, large trees growing in flawlessly mowed, thick, green grass.

It was a large, regional hospital for people with tuberculosis. Mom argued with the receptionist and the nurses. We children were not allowed to go and see Dad because he was under quarantine. The nurses said that the problem making our dad sick could also hurt children if we got near him. Mama was not pleased. The nurses were irritated. After Mama disappeared around a corner, I heard the nurses whispering, "What was that woman thinking coming in here pregnant and with small children?"

The waiting room got boring after a long while, so I took David outside to roll down a hill behind the hospital. I ended up dizzy after turning and tumbling just once. David gurgled in bliss on his third trip down. Mom found us outside and hustled us back into the car. She smiled much more than she before on the way back from the hospital. She was relieved as she told us that Dad would be coming home soon.

The doctors had figured out that he actually didn't have tuberculosis as they had assumed, which was the whole reason he had been sent to a TB hospital in isolation. Instead, he had hepatitis and valley fever, also known as *coccidioidomycosis*, an infection in his lungs.[26] He had originally contracted both conditions while serving in the Air Force. When his immune system weakened from working in a paint factory full of chemicals, both illnesses flared up.

We stopped at a park on the way home and had a picnic. I started to feel better after a peanut butter sandwich and grape juice. There were many bushes in the picnic area with bright red berries. David and I brought samples of different berries back to Mom so she could look in a wildlife survival guide to check if the little fruits were edible. None of the berries we found that afternoon were potential food. But Mom noticed that in the wild, dandelions *were* considered a source of food. After trying them, both David and I spat them back out. Bitter. Yuck. Nevertheless, with that book, in the event our family decided to hide away in the wilderness, we were ready to live off the land.

Dad was back at home in a few days and spending a lot of time in bed. When he came out at night to watch his favorite detective show, about Jim Rockford and his dad Rocky, I peeked around the piano to look at him. He had a yellow tint around his blue eyes where it should have been white, and his skin was a sickly yellow too.

"*Red or yellow, black or white, they are precious in his sight, Jesus loves the little children of the World . . .*"[27] I sang the little tune to myself. So, this was a yellow person. Since he looked tired and grumpy, it was a good thing that God loved him.

A few weeks later, Mama dislocated her knee while moving furniture around, so two of her sisters came to stay with us. At the time, I didn't realize that Mom was sending out pleas for help, and that everything was falling apart, especially for Grandma. From a preschooler's point of view, life was carefree: Head Start, books, puzzles, toys, and television. But, much later on, owing to our extended family's pack-rat tendencies, I found a February 1975 letter from Mom to our aunt revealing a very different picture:

"If you knew what an effort it is sometimes merely to get up out of a chair, or to bend over from what I can figure out, the organs and tissues don't get an adequate supply of blood, and it's sort of like when the juice goes down, the lights everywhere don't burn as brightly, the iron doesn't get as hot, the radio slows down, etc. to be MENTALLY DEPRESSED; and to have DIGESTIVE DISTURBANCES, COLD HANDS AND FEET, and VAGUE PAINS[2829]*. Boy, is that me, eh?"*

Our visiting aunts cooked and helped us with our baths. Feeling happier with some help, Mom would frequently sit at the old upright piano in our living room playing songs until her wrists hurt. She also knew how to play the accordion. The whole family, in-

cluding our grandparents, would often gather around her to dance and sing. They especially liked a rousing polka number. Soon, Mom complained that her crutches made her underarms hurt, especially since she was bursting with the baby almost ready to be born. She stayed in bed, lying next to Dad while he slept and slept.

I was lucky enough to be picked for Head Start, the preschool program for poor kids. I was enrolled in the local program when fall came. As I got ready for school on the first morning, I followed my routine of watching *Sesame Street*. I was so disappointed that leaving for school meant missing the rest of the program I loved so obsessively that I almost changed my mind about going to preschool.

But at the end of my short school day, I discovered that I could turn on the television to find that the second half of *Sesame Street* was on. This "divided *Sesame Street*" effect led me to believe that television shows stopped when you turned off the set and resumed when you returned. This arrangement alleviated any misgivings I had about school, so I was free to enjoy my new activity. I liked being around the other children, and I couldn't get enough of the sand table.

My fortunate enrollment in Head Start was the result of three things. The first was my parents' shame-ridden decision to seek out food stamps at my grandma's encouragement. My parents considered themselves conservatives who were firm believers in the notion that you should get by on your own without relying on government programs, so I was blessed they gave in to sheer need. Second, my grandma had pointed out that they were entitled to benefits because Dad had enlisted to serve his country during a war. Third, the state policy at the time was to *bundle social programs*, which meant you were offered all the services available to a person on the date of application. So, when my mom applied for food stamps, she was also applying for Head Start, Medicaid, etc. That policy brought an

educational intervention into my life that I needed but would not have otherwise gotten.

While I was at school, my little brother, David, being only three years old, spent his mornings throwing a tantrum because he wasn't allowed to go to school too. Then he spent the rest of his day with Mom while she ran the household. Dad went to work at the K.W. Muth Company, which manufactured chemicals and paints. Mom said that once, when she picked Dad up from work, she saw a man light a cigarette at the entrance to the factory, and the flames flashed up two feet in the air. She didn't like Dad working around dangerous fumes, but, as he put it, he never went to college, so he didn't have many options. Since this factory was where he got sick, he had to quit, so Dad didn't have a steady job anymore.

One day in September not long after her birthday, Mom suddenly left to go to the hospital. She was angry about it. She wanted to give birth to all her children at home, but her sisters said they weren't helping her give birth at home with a messed-up leg. Mom was convinced the hospital would be horrible, and it turned out to be exactly that. The day she went into labor, she arrived at the admitting desk on crutches, and the nurse misinterpreted her needs. So, she sat in the lobby for quite a while having contractions. Finally, her sister went up to the desk and raised a stink. Apologies were made. They didn't even let her kiss Samuel when she went to hold him for the first time. It was too unsanitary, they said.

She came back after being at the hospital for a few days. Not long after, David had to go to the hospital for spinal meningitis. It got serious, such that David could die, and Mom cried almost continuously. I felt guilty for all the times that I had left my little brother out of my play. I made a vow to change when my brother returned from the hospital. Eventually, about two weeks later, David got better.

Still, Mom was not done dealing with major stressors. Grandma Meyer was dying, and we expected her to pass away within weeks. Watching her mother deteriorate broke our mom's heart. In my oblivious state of early childhood, I was uplifted by the parade of visitors who came to see Grandma. Most of the visitors were family: our aunts, uncles, and cousins who stayed around for musical sessions with Mom at the piano or on the accordion. They read

to me. They nourished our environment. They were our village. For months these family members had come to stay with our dying Grandma, our pregnant, injured mother, and our sick father. This was all going to come to a screeching halt.

Mom was happy Samuel was born when he was since her mother got to hold him a little bit before she died, about a month later. In October 1975, Grandpa Meyer bundled up his childhood sweetheart, put her in the back seat of his car and drove her across Wisconsin and halfway across Iowa so she could die in Iowa, enabling him to collect on a life insurance policy. Then, when she died, instead of paying for a hearse to come and get her body, he asked around until he found someone who would loan him a pickup truck for him to haul her body. (I can't stop picturing poor Grandma bouncing around in the back of the truck as he drove to the funeral home). Eventually, my Grandpa Meyer took my grandma to Minnesota to bury her. I was too young to go, and I missed Mom and Grandpa while they were gone.

Arguably, most Americans are raised within an evangelical-authoritarian hierarchy. That is to say, we learn that: "*1) God is above all else; 2) We only live this life for the afterlife; 3) After man serving God, woman serves man; 4) Children serve parents; 5) The poor serve the rich; 6) Whites are over other races; 7) Straight is over gay; 8) Humans are over nature; 9) The healthy are over the sick*"[30]. This hierarchy is not unknown. It mostly just goes undescribed. Out of this hierarchy comes misogyny, sexism, racism, child abuse, homophobia, spiritual abuse, and a whole host of social ills. However, all these problems are driven at least in part by the violence and abuse of a personality

dynamic: the narcissistic abuse cycle.[31] This refers to the bond of the bully and his victim.

Evidence of Grandpa Meyer's narcissistic abuse is left behind in his many letters to family. In these letters, he degrades and berates anyone expressing dissent, but he elevates and praises anything he perceives to reflect glory onto him. Mom once told Grandpa that he didn't have to be so stubborn, so he kicked her hard in her backside, showing her that dissent meant physical punishment.

What becomes clear is that this is not only my family's own sickness but society's as well. Unfortunately, Grandpa Meyer was attracted to a theory that the poor were genetically inferior. He probably believed he was genetically superior as a German man and a man with money. Little did he understand his own family was going to get the genetic purification axe. In reality, Mom and Dad were both mentally ill and poor.

Later in life, Grandpa Meyer became addicted to talk radio host Rush Limbaugh, subscribing to his every opinion. Without realizing it, Grandpa was being groomed to buy into what has become known as the Great Replacement Theory. This theory was first highlighted in the 1987 book, *The Birth Dearth,*[32] by the American Enterprise Institute's Ben Wattenberg. Wattenberg wrote:

"The main problem confronting the United States today is that there are not enough white babies being born in this country. If we don't change this, and change this rapidly, white people will lose their numerical majority in this country, and this will no longer be a white man's land.

"There are three things we can do to solve this. Number one: We can pay women to have babies as they have been doing in Western European nations for years. Unfortunately, we would have to pay women of all colors to have babies, so we don't want to do that. The second thing we could do is increase the number of legal immigrants that are allowed into this country every year.

"Unfortunately, the vast majority of those wanting to come to this country are people of color, so we don't want to do that. Sixty percent of the fetuses that are aborted each year are white. If we could keep that sixty percent alive, we could solve the birth dearth."

Grandpa Meyer would have been ready to hear rhetoric that said immigrants from South America, South Asia, and the Arabian Peninsula would overtake the white population of the United Stat es.[33] Both of his sons embraced that rhetoric a generation later. And his grandsons two generations later.

But our grandfather wasn't focused initially on immigration. He was concerned with white women and their birth rate, especially relative to Black women and their birth rate. His politics were focused on race within the United States. His daughter would produce six white children.

Folks don't realize it, but it isn't Darwin they are referencing when they talk about survival of the fittest.[34] That can be attributed to Herbert Spencer, a eugenicist. He believed that you should not build things such as libraries for the poor,[35] as it just encouraged the genetically inferior to try to rise above their limitations.

Grandpa Meyer looms large in our lives because he was politically divisive. But so are other family members. Uncle Paul's decision to join the Mormon Church also weighs heavily. These men influenced Mom so much that she didn't have any notion of an identity outside what they'd written for her. This, in turn, would influence the rest of our family.

"My first memories are mostly of being rescued by your grandpa," our mother told us later in life. "He had to carry me into the house after I fell off a swing, and another time, I got a nasty dog bite. He was a giant of a man, especially to a little girl, and it felt good to have him come to my rescue. I must admit, I started to manufacture emergencies to get his attention. Unfortunately, as the fourth child out of six, it was easy to be overlooked."

Our egotistical grandpa was a domineering man. He was physically imposing as well, over six feet tall, with a broad chest and legs that allowed him to make record-breaking mile runs at the community college he attended. Not only was he athletic but he was also hand-

some. Besides having a voice that carried far, he was also clearly in command of not just his family but also his interactions with other people. He fancied himself a salesperson, although he was not. He talked too much, wouldn't let people get a word in, and ended up annoying many a listener. But he was also a genius. He invented things like his diaphragmatic breathing chair.

Born in 1915, our Grandpa Meyer[36] grew up in the Minnesota north country among white pines and iron miners. He could see no limit to his potential on his good days, but cameras often caught his lurking depression.

My grandfather in a suit looking a little dour

Figure 4. Grandpa Meyer

His family had invested in real estate and came through the Great Depression in better shape than most Americans. When he graduated high school in 1933, he was able to earn an associate's degree. Access to any form of higher education in the middle of the Depression showed that his family's wealth was above the norm. There were also relatives from the Twin Cities, who came to visit in limousines.

When C.K. Klein, one of his uncles and a St. Paul banker, passed away, the obituary in the *Minneapolis Star Tribune* described him as one of the state's wealthiest men. Our grandpa was said to have inherited a nice sum, although I never knew how much.

Being just a bit better off than the other workers never left our grandpa's mind. He taught his children, including Mom, that they were better than other people. He was unquestionably a snob, and the money contributed to this belief. The fact that he was good at

athletics and academics didn't help. He might have been completely insufferable if he didn't have an empathetic streak. He also had two brothers and their wives living with his family. This living situation meant Grandpa spent his time around aching miners, hearing their frequent complaints of sore backs. He knew at a young age that he would become a chiropractor and treat back pain. He went to Texas Chiropractic College in San Antonio, Texas.

Grandpa had been a highly successful chiropractor in Waterloo for about ten years when, in 1955, two major events happened. First, Mom's sister Cleo[37] caught Grandpa providing more than chiropractic services to a woman known in the area to be a prostitute. Mom, being young, wasn't privy to what was going on, but she knew her new baton got bent in half when Grandpa hit my Aunt Cleo with it. The baton beating may have been because of what Cleo saw, or it may have been because she came home pregnant as a sixteen-year-old at about the same time. Second, with family scandals and his own bad back dogging him, Henry decided to quit his chiropractic practice, move north to forty acres of land, and start a family business building RVs. The timing was perfect in his mind because Eisenhower had just created the national interstate highway system.

A proud man, Grandpa came home from the many RV shows he attended with his RV prototype, "The Escort," and told his family that his idea was ahead of its time. He did hold two patents on RV upgrades that were unique designs, allowing for collapsible extensions of the sides and back of a unit. They are still in use on RVs today. Privately, he must have worried that his business would have to offer something special because the competition was growing rapidly.

After reading about Grandpa's aerodynamically designed recreational vehicles in John Gartner's 1969 book, *All About Pickup Campers, Van Conversions, and Motor Homes,*[38] customers from Alaska to New York would drive to Iowa to pick up their custom-made vehicles. The pinnacle of his business career occurred when the *Ford Times* featured one of his models on the cover of their flagship auto industry magazine, and then the Kmart Corpo-

ration put a picture of his RV on the cover of one of their small US road atlases.

Instead of implementing what could be learned from that rapid growth into his business plan, he customized each RV with improvements from the previous model. This business strategy might have been profitable if he'd charged enough to compensate for the research and development. He did not. He never managed to get into major production as a result.

Because of his uneven business achievements, our mercurial Grandpa would spend hours yelling and preaching, often in the middle of the night, criticizing and blaming Grandma for what he perceived were her efforts to sabotage the family business. Grandma had been nervous about getting out of the established chiropractic business where they had done well and going into the risky new venture of building recreational vehicles. The RV business struggled over ten years, and Grandma worked hard to support it. They experienced three fires that burned his business workshops to the ground. So, because Grandma had been reluctant initially, Grandpa would take his setbacks out on her. Grandma never argued back; it was always a one-sided battle.

When Grandma asked their oldest son, Paul, to go and get a "real job" to support the family, it set Grandpa off even more. He would rant about Clara Ford, Henry Ford's wife, and how she was a true believer in her husband's business ideas.

Over and over, he would say, "Clara the Believer stood by her man, never let him feel unsupported. And look what happened with their family. They were the richest family, or close to it, during the Depression."

Grandpa felt the need to bring investors into the business. The company, Organizers and Underwriters, Inc., exercised a lot of power over decisions. It changed the logo and the business cards, and moved the location of the business to a place that was to quite a distance from where Grandpa lived. He was losing control of the inventions he had created. It wasn't his business anymore. Worse than that, these investors were *purposely* killing the business, perhaps to benefit the competition.

Our widowed great-grandma (Grandpa's mother) had lived with the family for many years, helping to cook, clean and watch the children. Even she thought he was too prone to infuriated, violent fits. Once she shook her fist at him and vowed to haunt him from her grave for his stubbornness. When she died unexpectedly one night, it was a hard loss for everyone, but particularly crushing for Grandpa. It turned out that she'd had an allergic reaction to a penicillin shot that a doctor gave her on a house call. The fact that mainstream medicine was responsible for her death did not go unnoticed by our anti-medical establishment chiropractor grandfather either.

Then, one windy, wintry day not long after her Grandma died, Mom came home early from school to find Grandpa had gone out of control. The house was a mess, chairs were overturned, and a pot of soup had been thrown all over. The scene was very frightening to her, so she drove into town to get their pastor. When they returned, no one was around. Foot tracks led out to the grove behind the house. They couldn't figure out what had happened. Pretty soon, Mom's brother Paul showed up and said he'd been called home from school by their mother, who had run to a neighbor's house for help. The pastor and our uncle finally found Grandpa in the top of one of their barns cowering and sobbing, and they sent him to the state mental hospital.

He wouldn't tell a soul what he was told about his diagnosis, but Grandpa often repeated that the psychiatrists believed he was "an ingenious man who struggled to be understood." He also was proud of the fact he only "cheeked" the medications the psychiatrists were trying to give him, instead of swallowing them. There was no way Henry Meyer was taking mainstream medicine. It's hard to say what the therapists were telling him, but he only heard their positive assessments of him, which is typical of a narcissist. Nonetheless, this hospitalization became a source of extreme bitterness for Grandpa. Eventually, Mom learned that Grandpa's diagnosis had been "agitative depression."

In 1968, after Mom's goodbye party for her Lutheran mission to Papua New Guinea, Grandpa Meyer stepped on Grandma Meyer's head when she was napping on the floor, and then told her if she was going to let other people walk all over her, he would too.

Chapter Four: Our Only Family Vacation

Mom was miserable. Her husband was sick. Her mother had died. Her son, David, had almost died from a bout of meningitis. She felt like a single parent to three children. Her father had betrayed her by not giving her husband a job as he'd promised. Society was changing. Women needed to work outside the home to support their families. The fact that Mom was mentally ill was a wrinkle in this emerging social demand.

Everything was going wrong. The doctors were recommending that Dad avoid exposure to air coming off the lake for the benefit of his lung condition. Mom decided it seemed like a good time to get away, a good time for what would be our only real family vacation.

She packed five sleeping bags into the back seat of the Impala, allowing David and me to see our surroundings, despite our short statures. There were no child safety seat or seat belt laws in those days. By today's safety standards, driving this way was foolishly death defying. But there was a ready supply of grape and vegetable juice in small metal cans with plastic pull tabs, and more food in the trunk alongside our tent. It was time for an adventure.

As we drove through Wisconsin, Dad amazed me as he told me the starting point and destination of every railroad track we encountered; I thought he was simply brilliant. Whenever we had to stop the car to wait for a passing train, he told us where the train was headed. Maybe he should have been a train conductor.

We drove to a Manitowoc, a city on the coast of Lake Michigan, that had a ferry service to the Upper Peninsula of Michigan. I was

impressed to learn that a ship could hold cars as well as people. Dad drove the car right onto this huge boat. Our family stood together at the side of the ship and watched the water turn as it cut through each wave.

On the other end of the lake, camping and sightseeing began. Dad was never fond of highways or other frequently traveled roadways, so he took us along back roads and dirt trails. We stopped to pitch a tent for the night at various campgrounds, and eventually, our journey took us into Canada. On a day trip in Ontario, we took the Algoma Central train into the mountains to see the Agawa Canyon.

The driving itself was made all the more pleasurable by Mom's singing. She would get us started with a rousing version of, "We Ain't Got a Barrel of Money," or "This Land Is Our Land." Dad didn't like to sing, but he never objected to our off-key renditions of the folk songs Mom loved. When we weren't singing, David and I played word games that had us giggling uncontrollably. Incessant chatter annoyed Dad, and he often commanded us to be quiet with his thunderous voice. His threats to stop the car were rarely, if ever, realized.

Dad liked the quiet, but he also loved listening to music on the radio from time to time. Sometimes he'd play his Gordon Lightfoot eight-track cassette. Mama was convinced "rock" music was unholy, but she would begrudgingly let him listen to it for short periods of time. There has never been a time of greater contentment for me than those handful of days on the highway with the sun warming our faces and Neil Diamond crooning love songs on the radio. I was five years old. David was three. Samuel was a baby. If only it had stayed that way. If only our parents could have gotten along like they did on that trip. If we could have stayed the way we were as we traveled around Michigan, Ontario, and Wisconsin, we would have been happy. But Dad was still sick, and mental illness lurked darkly in our lives.

Chapter Five: Everything Comes Apart

It was the two hundredth birthday of the United States, and the whole country was having a bash. We were still living in Sheboygan, Wisconsin. On the evening of the 4th of July, 1976, fireworks lit the sky over Lake Michigan. Our family sat in lawn chairs on our back patio.

The back patio usually served more utilitarian purposes. On laundry day, clotheslines were strung. Mom believed clothes were not handled suitably unless they dried in fresh air and sunlight. She used an old-fashioned wringer washing machine in the basement, and I assisted her with running clothes through the wringers to squeeze out the water. Then I would help her hang them up to dry. She lowered the height of one of the clotheslines just for me.

That Bicentennial night, the back patio was ideal for family togetherness. We had a picture-perfect view of the fireworks without having to walk down to the lake. Dad got out of bed to sit with us. Nothing seemed finer than having three generations of our family sitting as a small tribe. The setting exuded the kind of security a strong, free country and a tight-knit family always promised to provide. It was a conservative's dream.

That's when our folks broke the news to us. We were moving across the state. The only life I had known was in Sheboygan. My best friend was there. I went to Head Start there. I loved my kinder-

garten class there. I was supposed to start first grade that fall at the school right across the street from where I had gone to kindergarten. Instead, Mom and Dad started packing up everything we owned. I cried for so long and so hard when I heard about the move that I gave myself a tremendous, throbbing headache.

David didn't seem to mind it at all. He did as he had always done—tagged along after me no matter what I did. Baby brother Samuel, nearly a twin to David with pale blonde hair and azure blue eyes, not quite a year old, was especially indifferent about moving. I was the only one who was miserable—at least at first. I was going to be starting the 1976 school year in an unfamiliar place. The most traumatic experience in my short life was happening.

I broke out crying all over again on moving day and continued to cry while looking out the back window for the entire drive across the state. That's when I learned to associate crying with painful headaches. Crying became something I swore to avoid in the future.

I hated La Crosse, Wisconsin—no matter how many times its beauty was pointed out to me. I didn't care about immense rivers. They were supposed to replace the ocean-like lakes of Sheboygan, but I was a lake girl. Dad told me there were giant catfish living in the Mississippi that some thought were big enough to eat a person, but I wasn't impressed. It looked like La Crosse was surrounded by little mountains, which they called bluffs. The unusually tall bluff in the area was named Granddad Bluff, and hang gliders were often seen floating down from its slopes. Our new home was situated directly below it. I had to admit, I liked the gliders trailing down the tree-lined giant hill.

In October 1976, my first-grade teacher called me into an office with the school nurse. The nurse inspected my body and announced that I needed to leave right away because I was contagious. They called Mom at work to come and get me. While we waited for her to arrive, the teacher and the nurse discussed whether our family was clean or not. I had impetigo, and they were saying good hygiene would have prevented it. It wasn't true— we weren't dirty— but I was embarrassed for our family. I'd never heard anyone question whether we were clean before. That night, our parents got into the loudest, scariest fight I had ever heard. Mom was screaming that

Dad's lack of help with caring for the family led to this humiliating incident. I was secretly pleased that at least I didn't have to go to school.

Mama had seemed like such a happy person, at least when she was in Sheboygan, but no longer. We didn't have a piano in La Crosse. Maybe that was the problem. Above all, Mom was a traditional woman who considered her work to be childcare and household management. She believed her time belonged to her family. After I was born, she didn't have a job outside the home until we moved to La Crosse. It wasn't that she had never worked before. She had. It just had not gone well because of her mental health. She had to become the full-time breadwinner while Dad trained for a new occupation through a local vocational program. She must have believed he would take over some of the day-to-day parenting since he was at home a lot, but the fact that I also got twelve cavities around this time suggested he did not.

Mostly, he asked *me* to deal with changing diapers, feeding the baby, or tidying up the house. He was quick to yell, usually barking military commands, such as "Front and Center" to gather us together or "Attention" to silence us. We must have been a pretty slipshod and undisciplined military unit because he was continually dismayed at how long it took us to come to order. He would yell, and his face would turn dark red.

He was busy reading *Chariot of the Gods?*,[39] a book about the absurd idea that aliens built the ancient pyramids. Since he believed he had been abducted by aliens, this was well within his belief structure. An interesting finding from scientists studying reported alien abductions is that individuals with night terrors are significantly more likely to also report UFO abduction experiences. Dad may have had night terrors.[40]

He did make me feel special when we joined a group through the local YMCA called the Indian Guides and Princesses, a name that

I now see as embarrassing and culturally appropriated. This group was for fathers and daughters to do the same kinds of things Girl or Boy Scouts do. It was supposed to cheer me up and bring us closer, which it did.

The only thing that made living in La Crosse tolerable was that Mom and Dad were singlehandedly adding to the oil crisis on weekends as they drove all over the Midwest.

During the weekdays, Dad attended community college while Mom worked at a home for children with multiple disabilities. The weekends were for family road trips. It was our new family tradition to travel in the Chevy Impala around Wisconsin, Iowa, and Minnesota on day trips. The family drove up and down the Mississippi River, stopping at riverside parks for picnics. We visited nearly every lock and dam, those structures that manipulate the depth and flow of the river. There were also regular trips to a little café in Lansing, Iowa, for huge, warm cinnamon rolls.

On one of our trips around Thanksgiving time, Mom said we were going on a ride to visit Grandma and Grandpa MacIntyre, Dad's parents in Cedar Falls. During the whole trip down, Dad kept reminding us of the rules—and there were a lot of them. "Don't touch anything. Take your shoes off at the door. If you are asked any questions, let either your mother or me answer them. In fact, be silent. Show them how obedient you can be. Both of your grandparents like obedient children."

The closer we got to his parents, the more Dad's shoulders rose up in tension and the tighter his jaw clenched. As we parked in front of their tiny, lime-green house, he repeated the instructions again. I had only met this grandma and grandpa as a toddler, so I didn't know what to expect.

Grandma answered the door. She was a sizable person, over six feet tall with white hair and glasses. She smiled broadly and gave each of us an awkward hug. Grandma had polio when she was a little girl and the illness left her with a stiff arm and leg. The doctors had predicted she would not be able to walk, but she refused to listen. Grandma knew she wouldn't be able to go to school if she couldn't walk, and that was just unacceptable. She went to school that fall. Still, it was more than the stiffness of her body that made the hug

clumsy. This was not a woman who expressed physical affection much in her life.

Following behind her was our grandpa. He was the perfect picture of a farmer with OshKosh B'gosh overalls over a plain, pale-blue oxford shirt, even though he worked across the street at the Viking Pump factory and not on a farm. He had a few strands of hair combed over his bare head, and he wore glasses. He extended his hand for a shake rather than offering a hug. Before he fell in love with Grandma, he had strongly considered becoming a priest. One of his sisters, in fact, became a nun. But as he drove the tractor in his family's fields, Grandma would often wave to him from her horse-drawn buggy, driving to and from the local country school where she was a teacher. He found himself eager to wave back.

They were an awkward couple physically even if well-matched temperamentally. She stood nearly a foot taller than he did before putting on her shoes. She was sharp-tempered, quick to snap, and decidedly independent-minded. He was passive, gentle, and patient. She could manage a household with a professional touch. She was an expert with her advanced degree in home economics. Grandma raised her children as a first priority, but she brought in extra money by teaching piano lessons and sewing clothes before she became an adjunct professor once her children were raised. Grandpa MacIntyre had secured a meatpacking job during the years when meatpacking still paid well and workers were treated with respect. Well before Rath Packing Company and the other old packing companies were slowly going out of business, Grandpa became a plumber working for Viking Pump in Cedar Falls.

Grandpa's decision not to pursue higher education was not about an aversion to reading. He loved books. He taught himself about all types of birds and their calls. He loved to take children to feed the ducks in the park near the house. Grandma used to remind her children they were lucky they weren't poor people when within a block-and-a-half lived a family of eight kids in a three-room shanty that would flood when the Cedar River topped its banks. These children would go through the foundry slag pile looking for bits and pieces of brass, copper, etc., for salvage. Dad did, too, but he wasn't doing it to support his family.

Dad was an industrious young entrepreneur making money in all the ways a child could. He expanded into the scrap-metal collection business, where he once loaded six hundred pounds onto his little red coaster wagon, which he hauled about four city blocks to the scrapyard. He recalled how such an unusual spectacle drew the attention of the factory workers he had to pass by on the way. He also made money through an afternoon paper route, shoveling snow, and other odd jobs.

We all tried to walk from the front hallway into the minuscule kitchen, but there was not enough room. "Move along Deborah. David, sit on the sofa," Dad said. The adults stayed in the kitchen to "ooh" and "aah" over baby Samuel. Moving into the living room and glancing around, I noticed there were very few patches of floor that were not covered by furniture. I whispered to David: "This is a sardine can." He giggled.

The adults finished their oohs and aahs and came in to join us, Grandpa in his recliner, Grandma on "her corner" of the sofa next to the end table, and our parents around a table squeezed between the sofa and a desk. After a moment of pained silence, Grandma asked how we liked living in La Crosse. I instinctively lied and said it was nice. David nodded in agreement.

"And how's school?" Grandma inquired. I looked at Mom and Dad. Their eyes narrowed slightly. "Don't you dare mention the impetigo!" was in their expression.

"Just great, Grandma," I said, lying again. Why wasn't Mama jumping in? She loved to talk. She talked to everyone.

When Mom started to speak, and then cleared her throat, David chimed in first by saying, "Deborah just had a bunch of cavities!" I glared at him, and he fell silent again. The quiet was broken by excessively loud chimes from a grandfather clock next to a small piano. Then, bells rang to signify the time.

Grandma rose and walked toward the kitchen while asking, "I suppose you all are getting hungry?" She got out bread, mayonnaise, and lunch meat, making sandwiches for everyone. She poured juice into tiny little plastic glasses. There was only room for three people at the table, but they pulled it out and crammed another chair in front of the window. No one could move around the kitchen now.

Mom told David and me we were going to eat at the table in the living room, but Grandma said no. "They will eat with us. You and John can sit with the baby in the other room."

We were hungry, so David and I picked up our sandwiches right away. Grandma hollered, "Don't you say grace before you eat?"

"What's grace?" David asked. Grandma and Grandpa looked at each other, shaking their heads in disapproval. Then, they each moved a hand to their head and chest as they said:

"Bless us, O Lord, and these Thy gifts, which we are about to receive from Thy bounty, through Christ our Lord. Amen."

David and I remained silent. Grandpa asked in a weak voice, "Don't you even know the words?" which I quickly answered with, "Oh, we just forgot." Grandma and Grandpa just shook their heads and looked sorrowful.

Mom reminded Dad that we needed to get back to La Crosse, and he readily agreed. Time to get going. There were sighs of relief as we pulled away. They chastised us for all the things we did wrong during the visit. We shouldn't have talked about cavities, religion, etc.

On the way home, we stopped for a picnic at a lock and dam south of La Crosse. I almost never traveled without my Ernie doll from *Sesame Street*. After we finished our picnic, David and I decided to walk along the guardrail that prevented falls into the river. As we walked together, we began teasing each other, and David grabbed Ernie out of my hands. With a pitcher's arm, David threw my prized doll over the fence, where it fell into the waters of the Mississippi River. I was not the type of child to scream or become hysterical, but I began wailing. But within a few minutes, he came flying back over the fence, where he landed with a sloppy, wet thud. Apparently, some boaters had seen the stuffed puppet bobbing in the water and decided to rescue him. I thanked God with all my might and hugged the soaking wet doll so tightly that a stream of smelly river water squeezed out all over my clothes.

Our parents developed a habit in La Crosse that they didn't have in Sheboygan; they began arguing constantly and visibly in front of David, Samuel, and me. Something was wrong with Mom. She wouldn't stop yelling and crying. One thing was sure, she didn't like the fact that Dad had taken up smoking cigarettes again. She said they made her sick. She urgently reminded Dad that he had a lung infection, and smoking was bad for him. He said school was stressing him out, and he needed the stress reliever. I knew Mom was also angry and disappointed with the condition of our apartment, which she felt Dad only made worse. When he wasn't studying for school, Dad spent most of his time reading the Bible and *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible.*[41] He rarely spoke and interacted with me, and with the boys even less.

I won Dad over by having the best possible temperament as a baby—quiet, rarely crying, and making noise only in the form of a laugh or a giggle. If he had grown to tolerate me as his eldest child, primarily because of my ongoing mellow and obedient personality, he disliked David for being a loud, rambunctious child with little appreciation for authority. It didn't mean he didn't love David, but he struggled to warm up to him. He seemed to be taking a wait-and-see attitude with his second son, Samuel. Regardless, he spent only brief periods of time with us. His childcare skills were non- existent, while mine started to improve as I took care of Samuel for him. What six-year-old nurturer wouldn't want a living doll?

The only thing you had to do to make Dad angry was get "boisterous." His favorite word. For some reason, when my brothers got together, there was racket. David was habitually noisy, chattering loudly with anyone. I wasn't entirely innocent either. Dad found this deeply disturbing. His mother had never allowed such behavior in her house when he was growing up. Children occupied themselves quietly under Grandma's steely stare. Dad was used to seeing a woman lay down the law with just the stance she took, like a notorious sheriff coming through the double doors of a saloon. According to Dad, by letting the children "act like a bunch of hellions," Mom wasn't doing her job as primary caretaker.

Mom couldn't handle the detached father she saw before her. He wouldn't even hold his children. She remembered her father

as a very engaged dad. He decided what the family was going to do on weekends. He was the unquestioned leader. He doled out punishments. She questioned her father only once and got that kick to the ass. Although Mom didn't remember their family having any meals together, she said there was strong evidence that they ate, because there were always so many dishes to wash. Still, her dad took her family on frequent road trips, showed them how to have empathy for people, like down-and-out hitchhikers, and joined them in singing songs on the way.

She compared my dad to what her father was like and noted he had neither the self-assuredness of a wise elder nor the initiative of an entrepreneur. Dad was locked in his own mind so much of the time. He told her a few times, "I'm depressed." Mom panicked when she heard that. Her father had become so agitated and depressed during her teens that he needed to be committed to the state hospital. She thought about how her father had broken down, and she was worried to see it happening to another family—hers. Mom thought she would have to become the primary source of income. She'd watched how things deteriorated in her own family when Grandpa's business went poorly. She was scared about shouldering the entire burden of raising children and meeting the financial needs of the family.

A month later, in November, shortly after we returned from the trip to Grandma and Grandpa MacIntyre's house, there was a horrible day that grew into a terrible week. Mom was clearly upset about something. She was picking fights with Dad, loudly telling him he didn't help her enough. The next day was no better. Mom cried and shouted that the family didn't love her because we didn't help her with all the household chores. She said she was overwhelmed working full-time while raising three children under six years old. Dad wasn't even responding. He seemed to be imagining that he wasn't there at all.

After shouting at him a little longer, Mom came into the room I shared with David and began yelling that it was a mess. She turned toward me and ordered me to gather together each and every one of our toys because I was naughty for leaving them around. Quickly, I picked up all the toys and began throwing them onto the bed until I

could put them into their proper place. Mama always said, "There's a place for everything, and everything should be in its place."

She screamed at me for a while, and then scooped up all the toys. She grabbed a couple large garbage bags, tossed the toys into the bags, and declared she was taking them to children who would appreciate them. I pleaded for my dolls and stuffed animals, while David begged for his favorite playthings. "Too late," she said. If given to charity, there would be little girls and boys who would take better care of them.

I was horrified. I couldn't stand the thought of being stripped of all my earthly belongings. I implored with reason. I begged with tears. I promised to do better. Nothing worked. I hid Ernie and another doll in my closet, but Mom found those as well. I couldn't stop sobbing. Ernie was my only friend. Mom did not relent but instead left the apartment with our toys and belongings. I was so angry I screamed that I hated her, but only David heard. I wished she could've been there to hear my harsh words because she deserved each irate jab.

My rage turned to fear when she didn't come home that night. This feeling intensified as one day passed into another. Dad was around, but he was so quiet. He was never the type of person others approached to process tense or anxiety- producing situations. I went to school, but distraction kept me from remembering anything that happened while I was there. As I walked to and from school, my neck was stiff from my compulsion to look down at the concrete for every step. I mentally scolded myself to look up occasionally, but my eyes were fixed on the cracks in the sidewalk.

After Mom disappeared, I looked around the apartment and realized that it was really messy. While she was away, I gathered all the laundry, did the dishes, and vacuumed the entire apartment. Since I was only six years old, my laundry skills were poor. I put all the clothes together, and of course, I didn't sort by color. I was also unskilled with the use of detergent. After I finished the laundry, I put the wet loads into two baskets and waited excitedly for Mama's return. Needless to say, she was not pleased when she finally came home. She just looked at the soapy piles of clothes and the soap-filled washing machine and broke down in tears.

I felt guilty. I was determined to change, to stop being such a rotten kid. I could not be good enough fast enough. Later that day, Mom and Dad left the house quickly once again and didn't return for a long time. A stranger came to stay with David, Samuel, and me.

As it turns out, Mom and Dad were in Minneapolis, visiting a Lutheran pastor named Reverend Pfotenhauer. Mom had met Reverend Pfotenhauer when she went to his deliverance ministry. The first time she attended the ministry, she was very depressed, and she wanted the reverend to perform an exorcism to make her depression go away. This second exorcism was a shot in the dark to finally rid her of "the spirit of suicide" as she called it and her other demons. Based on what happened afterward, this second session with the reverend was no more effective than the first one had been.

In the meantime, primal scream therapy had become popular. Some friends convinced our parents to try it. This is how Mom described its effect on her depression:

"You remember how depressed I used to get, and felt so 'full' always? I didn't know what it was, but John [Dad] explains it that 'sin' is matter. Like Joseph Smith taught that our spirit is made of matter. This matter takes up room. Well, we saved ourselves that money and are in the process of getting the same results, just through prayer and the priesthood. I went through my primal scream, which I'd rather call a 'freedom scream.' John helped me. I believe I relived my birth."

Not much later in the month, Mom packed a few of our more portable belongings, got her three children ready, and left Dad. We didn't t even ask why we were leaving without him. But I did ask where we were going. After years spent chasing Dad's affection and involvement, Mom was at the end of her rope. When she received a phone call from the "Prophet Onias" around this time, she left Dad in every way but legally, declaring the marriage to be hell.

Mom said we were going to Canada. We boarded a train that took most of the night and into the next morning to finally stop. At last, part of the family arrived in Canada, where some man was waiting to pick us up. He was a stranger to me, but Mom gave the man a big hug, so I figured they must be friends.

The man who picked us up at the train station in Lethbridge, Alberta, had thinning, whitish hair and glasses, and he seemed nice. This was Bob Crossfield, the Prophet Onias. He drove our little troop to his home in the small town of Vulcan, Alberta. Other than having much more snow on the ground, everything looked the same as in the United States. All the houses in Vulcan were decorated for Christmas.

When we arrived at his house, we were introduced to Mrs. Crossfield, their children, and a host of other people of all ages staying with them. Then, smiling broadly and pointing to Mr. Crossfield, Mom announced, "Kids, this is your new daddy."

Chapter Six: The Prophet Onias

When Mom introduced us kids to Robert Crossfield, she turned to me and said, "He held you when you were an infant in Salt Lake City. He's a modern-day prophet." Eventually, he became a founder of the School of the Prophets, whose members have since gained infamy as murderers.

Not long after we arrived in Canada, Mom became Crossfield's, or as he preferred, "the Prophet Onias's," second wife. He was still married to his first wife, and of course Mom was still married to Dad. Nonetheless, Bob and Mom had a "wedding" ceremony in a hotel room. Then they traveled to Utah to celebrate their marriage with a honeymoon. While they were gone, one of Crossfield's sons became a regular babysitter. He was asked to watch David and me a few times when Mrs. Crossfield was out. His sleeping area was in the attic, and I slept right across the stairway in a walled-off room.

He started teaching me how to play chess. He started off slow, showing me the pieces that looked like horses and telling me they were knights. I fingered the plastic pieces, memorizing what he'd said about pawns, bishops, and rooks. Eventually I was playing a decent game for a six-year-old.

"Now, your queen, that's your most valuable piece," he said. "You want to protect it at all costs. You also want to use it strategically." But I liked the horses the best.

We played over and over until Jason[42] had shown me all the ways I could move my pieces and all the ways I could lose my pieces. Of course, he beat me handily. "Don't worry, kiddo. It's your first

time. There's no such thing as beginner's luck in chess. You just have to keep playing to get better and better." For some reason, I didn't mind losing to this teen. He was much older than I was, for one thing. It wasn't like I was losing to my little brother. Jason also treated me very nicely, including when he won.

"Let's play again." I must have said it thirty times that first night. David had long been asleep, and I should have been very sleepy, but it was very exciting to stay up late playing chess.

"No, sweetie. It is time for bed. We'll play again tomorrow," Jason replied.

The first time I saw a man's erect penis was five minutes later. I suppose he wasn't a man. He was sixteen, maybe seventeen. Jason was holding it in his hand, and swiftly stroking it. I had no idea if it was something I was supposed to see, and yet my instincts told me something was wrong. You see, he wasn't just touching himself. With his other hand, he was stroking my vagina.

He started out massaging my legs right after we played chess. He told me I would find it relaxing and it would help me go to sleep. When he pulled down my panties, I was embarrassed, but he said it was all right. He rubbed me gently. He said I was getting older, and I was ready for something new. Then, he started touching himself, breathing hard, and getting funny looks on his face. When he stopped having his hands on his penis, I was still awake. He kept rubbing my vagina because he said soon it would make me tired enough to sleep. I was tired, and it did put me to sleep. But I have no doubt that I tossed and turned.

I taught David how to play chess when he got a set for Christmas a couple of years later. David became incredibly good at the game. So good, in fact, that he was beating the president of the University of Northern Iowa chess club when he was in sixth grade. Me, I rarely played chess after Jason's predatory lessons.

Therapists and experts know sexual abuse often causes a child to become sexualized at a young age, leading them to see the world through a sexual lens.[43] They learn that relationships are not based in love, but in sex. It's a warped worldview, and it's made all the more painful by the fact that it degenerates cyclically. The more you're abused, the more you end up in abusive relationships, and so forth. There's another key ingredient to this, a corollary of sorts. No one ever teaches you how to be normal. No one ever teaches you how to be a healthy woman, functioning well in a relationship. In my case, my mom was not able to teach me any of these things.

By the time Crossfield moved our family to an apartment in another small Alberta town, still minus Dad, I was beginning to get suspicious about our mom's intentions. I'd thought we were just on a vacation to Canada. But we weren't going home. And Bob occasionally came and stayed with the family.

I was unaware Mom was writing letters to her family at this point, finally informing them of her new marital status. Here is some of what she wrote on February 10, 1978:

"By denying a woman her proper head (Bible says man is head of woman, and God is head of man . . . in addition, woman is head of her children, all in order), the church (by forbidding polygamy) has caused her to seek a less worthy man to be her wrongful head. Hence the children suffer, not having a proper and righteous man to head them. I know women's libbers would croak at this whole idea, but they don't realize the privileges that come to women with this. They say it's better that one woman has a man, and another has to go without, than to seek some crumb that's worse than nothing in many cases. Through revelation, God would give you the right head, so everything would be in order. [And] we've received revelation that this is true principle.

"Remember when we were in Salt Lake and I talked about the book of Onias that we'd read? Well, we've met the man who published the book, and basically, that's who we're with now. We believe his book to be a true revelation from God."

One night, when Crossfield was with us, I had a terrible nightmare and went to Mom's room. When I quietly opened the door, I saw that she and Crossfield were busy in the bed. It was the first time I saw two naked adults moving around like that. They didn't see me,

and I tiptoed back from the doorway, closing the door very quietly. I was suddenly angry that it wasn't my dad in the bedroom instead of Mr. Crossfield. I also felt disgusted by what I saw. Somehow, it seemed connected to being touched by a boy in my private place. After I had seen them having sex, I copped an attitude every time Crossfield was around.

I pretended to be asleep when he showed up, even though it was clear that I was not. One afternoon, they shook me for a full fifteen minutes while I pretended to be asleep. He tried to curry favor with me by giving me a doll, and then a coloring book. But I didn't show any sign of stopping my tantrums, silent treatment, and sassiness.

Onias and Mom approached me with unbelievable news not too long after that. I was to be sent to a boarding school in the next province for what amounted to reeducation. It was Crossfield's idea to send me to the commune in British Columbia where I could be trained to be a properly submissive young lady and future child bride. This whole situation confused me since I had still half-heartedly believed we were on vacation.

Bob drove me to an FLDS family's home that seemed a long way from Mom. They were, of course, complete strangers to me. They tried to make me feel comfortable in their trailer home. The women and girls all wore long dresses and bonnets. They were nice enough, but I was not optimistic as the reality of the situation became clearer. Bob wished me the best of luck at the new school I'd be going to, and then left me behind with this foreign family. I didn't cry for very long when he pulled away, even though I felt a knot in the pit of my stomach watching him go. Mom was nowhere around. And thus began my lifelong issues around abandonment.

A charismatic patriarch, deemed a prophet, typically leads each community or location where FLDS families live, although some prophets hold sway over more than one community. Crossfield was a prophet without a community. His followers were spread all over

mostly the US and Canada based on who had read his book, felt moved by it, and became a disciple of the Prophet Onias. Nonetheless, he had limited connections with the FLDS community in British Columbia—enough so that this family had taken me in.

I liked the first few days with the new people because they congratulated me for being a brave girl. They tried to help me adjust to being left there and to the rules. There were a lot of rules. They showed me around what turned out to be a small farm nestled in the foothills of the Skimmerhorn Mountains. A few other families lived on the same property in trailer homes. Rules included wearing special clothes, such as pantaloons and dresses that went from neck to ankle. Some men were considered leaders, and they were to be obeyed. I was required to be obedient and to "smile sweetly at all times," or "stay sweet," as I heard said all the time now. There were three young girls in the family, and I slept in a room with all of them, in a top bunk I shared with one daughter. The other two girls got the bottom bunk.

This family made their own ice cream, so I thought maybe this home was going to be all right, but I still missed Mom and the boys. I was giving less and less thought to Dad, at least on a regular basis. It was just too hard to think about him.

The school was different from any I had been to before. It was like the school on *Little House on the Prairie*, only twice the size. This school had *two* rooms: one for older students, and one for younger, who would now include me. They showed me my desk, and all the students surrounded me to say hello. It was hard to be the center of attention, and I wanted it to end quickly. But it also felt good to have everyone be so welcoming.

We often met in a large white meeting hall that looked like a barn. It was adjacent to the church and was used for large group activities or for lunch. Everything was done communally, which can be enticing in its own way, but it looked like there was a small crowd everywhere we went, with nearly every person there wanting to hug you. Sometimes this felt pretty good, but my advice to you is this: Be wary of lots of hugs from gatherings like this. Such "love bombing" is a primary recruiting tool for cults everywhere.

A picture of my father and myself (Deborah) working on a puzzle of the United States

Figure 5. My father and I working on a puzzle

I was told one of the other little girls was my cousin. I didn't believe this, but I liked my new friend. Her name was Virginia, and I laughed as I told her that there was a state in the US with the same name. I told her about how my dad used to do a big puzzle on the floor with my help, with the fifty states as puzzle pieces. Dad knew where everything was, and of course he even knew where all the real-life railroad tracks led.

I started to feel like I could learn to like this school. The evenings and weekends were what I found scary and disturbing. The second weekend I was there I felt settled enough to wander around the house like it was my own. I rose very early on Saturday morning, crept as quietly as I could, so I wouldn't wake the other girls, and slipped into the living room. I turned on the television set for the cartoons that had been a secret ritual for me for so long.

Suddenly, after just a few minutes of *Scooby-Doo*, the dad appeared, looking infuriated. He grabbed me by my arm and squeezed tightly. "We do not allow children to touch the television in this house," he hissed. I pleaded with him, saying I was sorry for waking him up, but he said he hadn't been sleeping. Cartoons were just not allowed in this house! This father where I was living seemed downright mean, and he frightened the hell out of me on a regular basis.

At recess time, Virginia and I went sledding down one of the biggest hills I had ever seen, and it was a blast flying down it on our toboggans. The trudge back up the hillside through the deep snow, in a long dress, was a whole other matter. It was also hard to deal with the boys when they would join us. They all pawed at our legs and under our dresses. Virginia helped me stop them, as they were so obviously out to molest me. This place was incredibly sexualized, as I would continue to learn.

With each day, I grew more homesick and less content. The dad drove us girls a long way to school each morning. I always suffered from terrible carsickness on the drive there and back. Though I was used to long car rides, I felt so nauseated on these trips to and from school that I often had to swallow my vomit. Then one day, I got *very* sick and threw up all over their car. They tried not to look upset, but I could tell they were.

When I wrote a letter to Mom explaining that I missed home, I received a package from her with a Mickey Mouse plastic purse. It contained two Canadian dollar bills and a picture of the family. I treasured the gift. I took it to school with me to show Virginia and left it in my desk. Having the purse there gave me a reason to tolerate the ride to school, and I began filling the purse with reminders of home.

One Saturday when Virginia came to visit, she and I explored the trees on the hillside and followed some of the numerous trails like we'd done so many times. But this time when we got back to the house, I encountered a miracle. I saw the familiar gold Chevy Impala.

And when I went in the house, I was astonished to see Mom and Dad together. I ran to them, and they scooped me into their tight hold. Right away, Dad acted frantic to leave. I wasted no time in packing my few belongings. Then I remembered the Mickey Mouse purse in my desk at school. I begged Mom and Dad to drive to the school and get Mickey. But they insisted that it was too far out of their way, and that the school would be closed on a Saturday anyway.

I knew that I should have only been glad that Mom and Dad were taking me home to La Crosse, but it felt like a piece was being

ripped out of me. I cried and complained. Dad became really scared, though, and said, "We have to get out of this place, *now*!" I didn't understand his sense of urgency at the time.

Mom was nervous too and wanted to leave the Creston area. We were in a fundamentalist Mormon religious compound. These people didn't let go of girls easily, and had a history of violence. We needed to get out of there fast. Mom and Dad bought me new, flowered underwear in place of my lost treasure, but I still wept silently. It is probably not surprising that new underwear didn't cut it for a six-year-old who'd lost a Mickey purse.

Dad always believed it was Crossfield's scheme to get his hands on me as a wife someday. At the time, I discounted this claim like so many others he would make. But wouldn't you know it? Years later when I was in graduate school, Crossfield tracked me down and left a message on my website asking me to get in contact with him.

On the way home, Mom and Dad repeatedly insisted that once we arrived in Iowa, we were never supposed to talk about Canada. They said we were going to make a new start in Iowa, their home state. In fact, we weren't going to live very far from Grandpa and Grandma MacIntyre, they chirped. And don't forget: *Never mention Canada.*

My exposure to the FLDS began to change my beliefs about religion and churches. When you live through the beginning of a religious sect, meet the leader, and come to realize that he is a fraud, it makes it difficult to believe that any other church leaders from any other place and time are any more truthful. One person's prophecy is another's delusion. Coincidentally, the mass suicide in Jonestown occurred in the same year that Mom married Onias.